

Edwards and Belmonte emphasize that throughout Polynesia, the New Year was traditionally measured from the first appearance of the crescent moon after Matariki was first seen in the dawn sky in mid-June, its so-called “heliacal” rising. It just so happens that around a thousand years ago, when Matariki was low in the dawn sky at an altitude of around six degrees, it was almost exactly at the azimuth of the June solstice sun when it first appeared over the eastern horizon. Moreover, Orion’s Belt — Tautoru — is and was very close to the same astronomical declination as the equinoctial sun. Therefore, the very real possibility of a dual interpretation exists, namely that an astronomically oriented platform or set of cupules could very well have been intended to mark the directions to both the Pleiades at its helical rising and to the rising solstitial sun since both would have occurred at the same azimuth. And the same can be said for Orion’s Belt and the equinoctial sun.

Thus, this reviewer concedes that Edwards and Belmonte may be partially right. However, it should be remembered that Rapa Nui is well out of the tropic zone and that the inhabitants do experience seasons and therefore had to be concerned with the best time of year to plant crops such as taro, bananas, and other edibles. So maybe on this special little island, the sun was considered to be the more important celestial body. Furthermore, at the southerly latitude of Rapa Nui, Matariki never appears as high in the sky as it does in tropical zones. Being less conspicuous, therefore, it may not have had the same significance as it did elsewhere in Polynesia.

However, I certainly fully concur with the final conclusion of the authors, namely that the last word on Rapanui’s archaeo-astronomy has not yet been said.

My congratulations go out to the authors for finding the rock “for observing the stars” on Poike that was described by Routledge. My wife and I were twice unsuccessful in our searches (and once charged by a bull who objected to our presence). However, their suggestion that a group of cupules etched on a nearby rock was a star map that “likely represents Matariki” was not entirely convincing to this writer who was unable to see a resemblance to the well-known asterism.

As for their suggestion that the two *ahu* at Tepeu were intentionally aligned with the once-in-18-year concurrence of lunar “standstills”, this reviewer is not entirely convinced because of the subtle nature of this event. Would the island’s astronomical priests have been able to note and record the rarely occurring extreme declinations to the moon? If so, they probably would have been able to predict solar and lunar eclipses. As this reviewer has written, there was a remarkable series of five total and near-total solar eclipses during an eleven-year period late in the 8th century CE. That onslaught of what must have been frightening events could have provided the motivation to understand and predict future eclipses.

I have long admired my good friend Edmundo Edwards and his dedication to Rapa Nui and Polynesia, but I must make two criticisms — one major, one minor. Surely, *mi amigo*, you should have known better than to claim copyrights to the second paper’s Figures 7 and 9 which are exact copies of Figures 4.107 and 6.16 of Georgia Lee’s 1992 classic work,

*The Rock Art of Easter Island.*

And the Rapanui word “nui” means “big”, not “small” (Reference 4 in the first paper). But surely you knew that, too, Edmundo.

I am most grateful to Georgia Lee for bringing these two important articles to my attention and to Shawn McLaughlin who first brought these article to the attention of Dr. Lee and later made useful comments on an earlier draft of this review.

(Note: Most of the work and ideas of the reviewer have been summarized in his book *The Ancient Solar Observatories of Rapanui*, a publication of the Easter Island Foundation.)

\* Eastern Pacific Research Foundation, Archives  
(Chapter 12), 2007

\*\* 35:421-433 (2004)

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## EL ORGULLO DE SER RAPANUI - DOCUMENTAL

(*The Pride of Being Rapanui - Documentary*)

Denise Ducaud

2008; 60 min.

16,000 Chilean pesos / \$25

presently available only through  
the Museum Store on Easter Island

*Review by Shawn McLaughlin*



As most Rapanuiphiles know, it’s notoriously difficult to find a decent documentary about Easter Island. Oh, there’s no shortage of films, videos, and DVDs, although some of them can be hard to find. It’s taken me years to accumulate the more than 50 documentaries in my collection and yet only a few of them stand out as being both illuminating *and* accurate without descending into lame drama about “mysteries” or provoking researchers into adolescent squabbling over their pet theories — or, worse, sum-

moning the specter of “ancient astronauts”. (Why do these productions feel it necessary to give equal time to theories that don’t even deserve to be discussed, let alone be given screen time? *Oh, well.*) Nor has the passage of time meant the productions necessarily get any better. One of the most interesting is a black-and-white film shot during the Franco-Belgian Expedition in 1935. The Cousteau Society’s *Blind Prophets of Easter Island* has its 1970s charm (and, among other things, the near-fatal but rather dramatic sequence

involving an ultra-light caught in heavy winds over the island). In some ways, one of the least sensational and comprehensive documentaries would have to be the dual BBC/Nova works released in 1988 and 1989, dated though they are. When documentaries focus on specific rather than general subjects, the result is often more apprehensible and insightful and even palatable: Laura Jean Boyd's *Caballo Loco on Easter Island* (about the plight of horses and cows stricken by eating toxic plants), *The Undersea World of Easter Island* (by the ORCA Dive Shop — with stunning aquatic footage in the “blue hole” that is Easter Island's ocean home), and the two Te Pito Productions films, *Casino Free Rapa Nui* and *Being Rapanui* come to mind (the latter, despite obvious political agendas, nevertheless provide unique local perspectives). Still, even with documentaries shot as recently as 2007 (an atrocious Travel Channel film comes to mind), it's tough to escape the lunatic fringe (think David Childress or Erich von Däniken, for example).

It is thus with great pleasure that I can announce and recommend Denise Ducaud's documentary, *The Pride of Being Rapanui*. In Spanish with English subtitles, this production covers themes like “Memories”, “The First Airplane”, “Life Today”, “Music”, and “Pride” and features a series of interviews by islanders representing a cross-section of the population. Musician Manu Haoa talks about helping children to learn to dance and sing; herbalist Isabel Veri Veri discusses plants for medicinal and other uses; sculptor Bene Tuki relates how sometimes he doesn't want to sell his carvings because he becomes too attached to them (he also tells the story of how, as a child, he ran from an airplane, thinking it was a bird that was going to eat him!); craftswoman Merina Manumatoma conveys a quaint tale about sneaking into the “cinema” hidden under her mother's large coat and recalls a neighbor with the only TV on the island (a 14" black & white model). Other interviewees include singer/songwriter Maria Teresa Ika; craftswomen Mafra Muñoz Rapu and Patricia Riroroko; surfer and tour guide Nicolas Yancovic Pakarati; Explora guide Uri Avaka Teao; dive shop owner Mike Rapu; and student / sportsman Aku Icka. All of these presentations are passionate and humanistic and create an accurate portrayal of the people and by extension the life of the Rapanui. One criticism I had in the choice of material, however, is an interview with craftswoman Noemi Pakarati who displays and talks about her petroglyph rubbings — a practice strongly discouraged today. And, while it's good to see she's not wearing shoes while walking on the petroglyphs, it's bad that she's walking on them in the first place.

The lighting and sound are crisp, vibrant, sophisticated, and professional, revealing the island in all its colorful glory, and the transitions between segments and musical and vocal accompaniment is evocative and appropriate. Not that *The Pride of Being Rapanui* lacks defects. The first European visit is erroneously referred to as occurring in 1772 instead of 1722, an early population figure of 9,000 is mentioned without a shred of qualification despite the lack of consensus or definitive knowledge about this, and cannibalism is described as happening without any skepticism in light of the fact that no

reliable archaeological evidence of this practice has been discovered on Easter Island to date. (Admittedly, later in the documentary, one of the interviewees describes the Rapanui as survivors who will do so by any means necessary, including eating others, so maybe this is a moot point; *ahem*.) And that erroneous 111 population figure rears its ugly head again, as if to validate the notion that there's no such thing as a flawless Easter Island *anything*. (At the same time, one must acknowledge the wise observation of the renowned Tucson psychiatrist John Racy who once said “Perfect is the enemy of the sane”.) But these are minor points. The only major issue to which I take exception is the jingoistic last sequence in which islanders with a straight face assert that they are nicer, more cordial, and more welcoming than the “contis” (continentals; Chileans) — statements that, even if accepted as the biased generalities they are barely escapes the realm of bigotry. I am not ignorant of, nor insensitive to, the issues involving Chileans on Easter Island but such statements do a disservice to what I would like to believe are the less prejudiced inhabitants of the island who would be hard-pressed to agree with one interviewee's assertion that the Rapanui “don't know how to hate”. Sorry, but no humans have a monopoly on this, however much one may wish it to be true. Rapanui are humans and humans know how to hate.

But philosophical disagreements aside, *The Pride of Being Rapanui* is for the most part a clear, gentle voice set against the clouds, the sun, and the wind of the island. Whether one agrees with the assessments of those being interviewed or not, there is an undeniable importance to this documentary in that it embodies the faithful transmission of culture and language and therefore preserves these vital elements for all to see and know. Just as living on Easter Island is unique, just as Easter Island itself is unique, so is this documentary. Unlike far too many other documentaries out there, if you get a chance to see this one, you won't regret it.

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## NEW EXHIBITION IN PARIS: RAPA NUI, L'ÎLE DE PÂQUES

Espace Fondation EDF  
6, rue Récamier 75008 Paris

### *Review by Paul Bahn*

Hot on the heels of their major exhibition at the Louise Leiris Gallery in Paris in the Summer of 2008, which not only launched their huge book on the collections of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, but also presented most of the objects from that collection (see *Rapa Nui Journal* 22[2]:144-145, October 2008), the tireless Orliacs produced a second Easter Island exhibition in Paris. Running from November 20, 2008 to March 1, 2009, this show presented virtually all of the objects from the island which are to be found in France, both in museums and in private collections.